

Hurricanes

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Alison Arnold Writes...

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This is the season of hurricanes. The first one has just battered the North Carolina coast. While watching the pictures on television, I heard a 12-year-old say, "I wish we'd have one here. It would be exciting!"

But anyone who has lived through a full-fledged hurricane would never want to experience another. Duxbury has had several, but has been lucky for the past 20 years, the worst and most damaging hurricane was in September, 1938.

On Sept. 18, 1938, ships in Atlantic waters flashed warnings to the U.S. Weather Bureau. Wind velocity reached 130 miles per hour. The storm was headed for Florida and the Keys. Coastal areas braced themselves and tied fast every movable object.


Then the hurricane abruptly shifted its course. It would swerve east, spending its force in mid-Atlantic. But instead, it came straight up the coast. On the New England seacoast there was an alarming drop in the barometer. At 1:30 pm on September 21, the Boston Weather Bureau announced: "The tropical hurricane is now in the vicinity of New York."

Persistent rains had drenched New England. The Connecticut and Merrimac Rivers were overflowing their banks. It was high tide Wednesday afternoon. The hurricane curved up the Connecticut valley. But Massachusetts residents considered themselves lucky, at worst, they could experience a line storm.

Along the shore, sailing enthusiasts, with the promise of better weather, were planning at least one more cruise before putting up their boats. The barometer began to fall flat. By 1 in the afternoon, it had tumbled to 29.

The wind increased. Pleasure craft dragged their anchors and were either grounded on the beach or swamped under the pouring of heavy rain. At 3:30, the hurricane struck Long Island. Then Bridgeport and New Haven. Buildings toppled. Providence was flooded. The

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devastation was unbelievable. Then onto Massachusetts. In Marion, the entire Beverly Yacht Club was swept away.

Sometime after 4 o'clock, the storm descended on scores of towns to the west and  Boston. In Duxbury, the storm roared and screamed all night. I remember watching a huge elm tree sway and pull and finally crash with a roar. Trees that were standing before the Pilgrims landed crashed down. Almost every house had a big tree leaning against it.

The town was dark. Electric refrigerators and stoves were mute, cooking was done in fireplaces. Candles glimmered faintly and telephones were silent. This continued for days and crews of repairmen from all over the country were imported to help the local workmen.

The next morning the devastation was horrifying. Great trees lay uprooted everywhere. Every lawn was piled with debris. Gardens were ruined. Shingles were torn off and roofs collapsed. Yacht Club boats were piled up on the lawn, splintered like matchsticks. The pier was torn away.

Property damages can never be estimated. Seventy-two million feet of wire were down and 400 miles of cables. More than a million telephones were out of order. Railroad crews repaired or rebuilt bridges and cleared the road of houses, boats and trees.

No one who lived through that holocaust would EVER wish for another. It was "exciting" to say the least.